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Petrocan

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Petrocan

Dismantle yourself in a gas station bathroom. Curl soap around your tongue and scrape sleep from the corners of your eyes. Swipe your hands down your clothes, smooth your edges, and breathe the sanitized fluorescence. Close the door behind you.

Pick up the drink that will leave your hands quaking and a twinge in your teeth. Supervise your fingers on the coins. Smash receipts into corners of your pockets.

Outside, shake out your fingers, the petroleum stains which have hardened into lines of your knuckles. The landscape boils flat with afternoon. White dust dilates your edges, an ache of sun that your nails twitch to grasp. Sit in the dry grass and watch the pavement waver. Let your throat scratch with shards, broken mirrors and vacuum cleaners.

In the bleached length of summer, allow your skin to strain like cracked sidewalks. Your tongue drags heavy with noises you can't touch with sound. Traffic surges with no whisper. Every red car pierces your eyes.

Inhale the white dust. Shift your gaze down, past shoelaces and words.

Dark birds weave their shapes through the intersection, clutching the updraft. They carry the shape of their passing, jewel the air with a speech more ancient than yours. Behind your breathing, listen. This may be important.

MADELAINE CARITAS LONGMAN was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and currently lives in Calgary, Alberta. Her work has appeared in several magazines including *Frogpond*, *filling Station*, and *Nōd*.